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ABSTRACT

To investigate differences in students' writing development due to teacher modeling, a study examined students enrolled in whole language classrooms in grades 1 and 2 in two separate school districts. Students enrolled in independent classrooms where teachers did not provide writing models were in a school in a lower middle class neighborhood of Vancouver, British Columbia. Approximately 65% of the students were from families in which English was the second language (ESL). Modeling classrooms were in a school in a middle class neighborhood of Richmond, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver. Approximately 30% of the students were ESL. Teachers in independent classrooms asked students to write on the first day of class. Students read their writing to the teachers who responded positively. Teachers also kept notes about students' writing. As students began producing more mature texts, teachers kept a chronological log of their conferences. Teachers in the modeling classrooms asked students what they would like to write, then wrote the sentence(s). Often students emulated the teacher's model. In addition, teachers wrote comments containing the essence of what students indicated they had written. For both types of classes, students' writing for first and second grades was photo-copied. Each writing product was analyzed for number of words, number of t-units (independent clauses with all attendant modifiers), quality, and topic choice. Quality was measured on a nine-point experimental scale developed to reflect writing structure and quality. Findings revealed that both strategies produced eager, competent writers. (Two figures are included.) (MM)

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The Effects of Teacher Modeling on Primary Writing

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The Effects of Teacher Modeling on Primary Writing

Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years or so, considerable debate has been generated over models of reading and their subsequent pedagogical applications. Unfortunately, "Both the research and teaching communities have erred in believing that a theoretical model of reading has immediate practical implications for instruction" (Gunderson, 1985, p. 253). Indeed, Gunderson concluded that reading models cannot suggest teaching practice until they become models of reading instruction. Whole language instruction is based on a model of language acquisition, one that posits that language, including reading, is learned in an environment emulating the "conditions of early readers' learning environments" (Gunderson & Shapiro, 1988).

In effect, whole language instruction is based on a model of language acquisition which includes items related to learning environment, learning activities, nature of language, and role of teachers, an instructional model. Whole language is exciting because it has been field-generated by educators involved on a daily basis in the teaching of literacy. We have observed two major variations in instructional practices related to the writing process in whole language classrooms. In the first, the teacher functions as a guide who never imposes a mature written

model on students, but rather encourages independent writing development. The second practice finds the teacher guiding the students by providing a written model in a positive, non-judgemental manner. We will refer to the two as independent classrooms (or students) and model classrooms (or students) respectively.

Teachers in independent classrooms believe language is learned naturally and independently, mature writing models should not be imposed on students. When a teacher writes a comment on a student's work, regardless of the content of the message, it communicates to the student that there is a "correct" form. The student, seeing that her writing is different than the teacher's, becomes uncomfortable and less willing to write freely. The teacher's writing functions as a block to natural independent writing development.

Model teachers believe that modeling is essential. Indeed, an important component of learning to speak is parental modeling. It seems logical, therefore, that if modeling is an important feature of learning to speak, it should have a role in writing. The model is provided in a positive manner that does not communicate negatively about students' writing. The opposing beliefs have a crticial influence on teaching practices. This article contains the report of a study that investigated differences in students' writing development due to teacher beliefs in modeling.

Classroom Programs

Students involved in the study were enrolled in whole language classrooms in grades one to two in two separate school districts. Students enrolled in independent classrooms where teachers did not provide models were in a school in a lower middle class neighborhood of Vancouver, British Columbia. Approximately 65% of the students were from families in which English was not the first language (ESL). Model classrooms were in a school in a middle class neighborhood of Richmond, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver. Approximately 30% of the students were ESL.

Independent Classrooms

Teachers in these classrooms asked students to write on the first day of first grade. If they indicated they could not write, the teachers encouraged them, told them they should try, but did not offer to write for them. Students read their writing to the teachers who responded positively, encouraging further writing. Teachers also kept notes about students' writing, usually transcriptions recorded on the back page of logs or in separate books. As students began producing more mature texts, teachers simply kept a chronological log of their conferences.

Modeling Classrooms

The teachers in the suburban school believed that modeling was important. Students who could not or would not write in September of grade one were asked what they would like to write, the teacher wrote the

sentence(s). Often students emulated the teacher's model. We do not use the word copy because, in fact, students' responses often contained reductions as shown in Figure One.

Insert Figure 1 about here

In addition, these teachers always wrote a comment containing the essence of what students indicated they had written. The following is a typical example:

> (Student) "I LV CR bRS" (I love Care Bears).
> (Teacher) "I'm happy you love Care Bears, Janice."

Procedure

Students' writing for first and second grades was photo-copied. Each writing product was analyzed for number of words, number of t-units (basically an independent clause with all its attendant modifiers, see Hunt, 1965), quality, and choice of topic. Quality was measured on a nine point experimental scale developed to reflect both "writing structure" and quality.

Findings

Traditionally teachers have thought that first grade students were not ready to write. Indeed, Hunt (1965) stated that it wasn't until the fourth grade that "... most average children are ready to write" (p. 2). Students in both kinds of classrooms, however, did write.

Modeled Writing Development

Slightly over 50% of the students in model classrooms were unwilling or unable to write independently in the beginning of first grade. Their teachers asked them what they would like to write, and wrote it for them. About 10% began writing letter strings. By the beginning of October all but two students produced wholely independent writing. By the end of November, all students produced independent writing. The teachers' writing models were very powerful. Students in these classrooms did not exhibit similar progression through writing stages exhibited by early writers identified in other studies (DeFord, 1980; Sulzby, 1986).

Independent Writing Development

Students in independent classrooms did not, on the average, begin to produce mature-like text until February of first grade. Their writing development was wholely independent and reveals remarkable similarities to the development of writing of pre-school children noted by such authors as DeFord, 1980; Dyson, 1981; Ferreiro, 1986; Hipple, 1985; and Sulzby, 1986.

Many began to write by producing pictures that represented their texts, which they could read to their teachers. Following this stage, students began to produce text containing letters, letter-like shapes, and numbers. Chow (1986) called this the "pre-phonetic" stage because writers learn that written symbols represent language but do not understand the relationships between particular letters and sounds or words. We suggest the term pre-phonic instead. Both stages were extremely transitory.

As students began to understand the function of writing, they began to produce text containing "phonic hits." For instance, a student produced the letters "ISAB" to represent "I see a bee." Clearly, the student did not randomly select letters, but selected them because they represented initial phonemes. Indeed, she made "phonic hits." Picture writing and pre-phonic writing were clearly distinguishable. Pre-phonic and phonic writing often occurred in the same product. The influence of print was obvious. These students were immersed in print. Their teachers read to them, they read each others' writing, and they read material posted on the walls. They began to produce text containing non-conventional spellings, e.g., <u>the</u>, <u>was</u>, showing they were beginning to learn some words as "sight words." Finally, students began to produce text containing invented spellings, "correct" spellings, and many writing conventions. On the average, students in these classrooms produced such

text on a regular basis in February of first grade.

Modeling vs. Independent Writing Development

Three distinct "writing structures" were observed in both schools. Students began their writing by producing single sentences, usually illustrated. Following the single sentence stage, one lasting one to four months, students began to produce 2-3 sentence writing products. Such writing often contained three "story segments," e.g.,

> My dad and I went to the prak (park).
> We saw the man cach (catch) a fish.
> We walk (walked) home.

The 2-3 sentence period lasted some two to six months. There was a great variability in the length of the first two stages that appeared to be wider between individuals than it was between classrooms. Eventually, students began to produce more elaborate texts. These apparent stages may be due to a number of factors, the development of the motor skills related to controlling pencil and paper, the size of the writing surface, students' ability to handle the mechanics of writing, or an interaction of some or all of these factors.

Quality of Writing

Three independent raters randomly sampled the writing produced over the first two grades. An experimental nine-point quality scale was used to rate the writing. The quality scale was related to the observed writing stages mentioned above. Scores of one to three were reserved for single sentence writing with one being assigned to the lowest quality and three the highest. Scores of four to six were used to rate two-three sentence products and seven to nine were reserved for products of four sentences and longer. The scale is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. In total, about 2,700 samples were rated. Inter-rater reliability was .98 for words, .93 for quality, and .89 for t-units.

Figure Two shows the growth of quality over two grade levels. The data for the first four months of first grade for the students in the independent classrooms are based on only four students.

Insert Figure 2 about here

The same trend shown in Figure Two was found for all the variables studied. The model students showed initial rapid growth in all areas while the independent students' development was initially quite slow. Table One shows the mean number of t-units, words, and words/t-units produced by the students in May of First and Second Grade.

Table One

	Model			Indep.		
	T-U	Words	Comp*	T-U	Words	Comp
1st	5.55	61.20	11.03	14.22	86.22	6.06
S.D.	5.02	67.89	5.00	23.43	160.25	1.93
2nd	6.11	64.31	12.78	14.92	110.92	7.37
S.D.	4.24	37.67	9.60	11.78	86.38	1.65

* Comp "Complexity"=words/t-units

The means shown in Table One represent production in a single month at the end of the school year. May was chosen because in both schools students experienced a "June Swoon" in which writing production decreased considerably. Teachers in both schools suggest the dip was caused by the numerous activities that normally accompany the last month of school. Students in the model school produced higher quality writing in first grade than did the independent students (4.55-sd 2.42 vs 2.08-sd 1.16) while means showed little difference for second grade (6.22-sd 1.84 vs. 6.16-sd-2.24). The mean number of t-units was 3.17 (sd=3.63) for model students in first grade and 3.84 (sd=7.70) for independent students while in second grade the means were 5.49 (sd=3.83) and 14.83 (sd=24.17). Mean number of words produced in first grade for model students was 29.27 (sd=42.65) and 22.98 (sd=50.38) for independent students while second grade results were 50.11

(sd=35.60) and 138.01 (sd=316.51). Complexity, as measured by the number of words per T-unit was 8.99 (sd=6.07) for model students over first grade and 6.20 (sd=3.73) for independent students, second grade results were 9.99 (sd=4.60) and 8.50 (sd=7.20).

Discussion

The teachers in this study all described themselves as whole language teachers. They were divided, however, in their view of their role in students' writing development. Students in both classrooms wrote a great deal. Writing development differed, however, according to the teachers' beliefs in modeling. Independent writing development in first grade revealed stages similar to the those observed in studies of emergent writing of pre-school children. Grade one teachers' models were associated with great growth in writing. By the end of the second year, independent writing development had equalled or surpassed that observed in the model classrooms.

Whole language teachers design their classrooms based on their "philosophy." Whole language instruction is based on a set of beliefs about language learning, learning environment, meaningful language, the nature of language, and the integration of all the language arts. Teacher strategies differed depending upon their beliefs. Those, convinced writing development should be totally independent, did not impose a writing model on their students. Those, convinced that adult modeling is important, wrote on

students' writing, always including the essence of what the student had written.

While caution should be exercised in interpreting the effects of modeling versus no modeling since the groups differed on socioeconomic status, it is important to note that both strategies produced eager, competent writers. Teachers who adopt one of the approaches can be assured that it will produce proficient writers. Indeed, two of the students in the independent classrooms were non-English speakers in the beginning of first grade. By the end of second grade, they were writing freely and quite fluently in English. A teacher's model does affect the kinds of activities taking place in a classroom. This study has shown the effects of teachers' models over two years. It is not yet clear, however, what longe range differences due to teachers' beliefs in modeling will have on student development. We await the arrivial of these students in upper elementary or secondary classrooms. What will teachers think about students who like to write, indeed, who gladly write pages and pages of text?

The writing development of students enrolled in two different kinds of whole language classrooms has been observed in this study. Teachers in both groups developed their teaching strategies based on their own personal beliefs about language acquisition and learning. Results of this study reveal that strategies based on models of language education are quite powerful. Indeed, classrooms in the present study were

quite similar in that teachers were well experienced (none having less than ten years of experience), students were actively involved in literacy experiences, and meaningful reading and writing were featured. Teachers must judge for themselves, based on their own philosophy of language learning, whether to model, or not to model.

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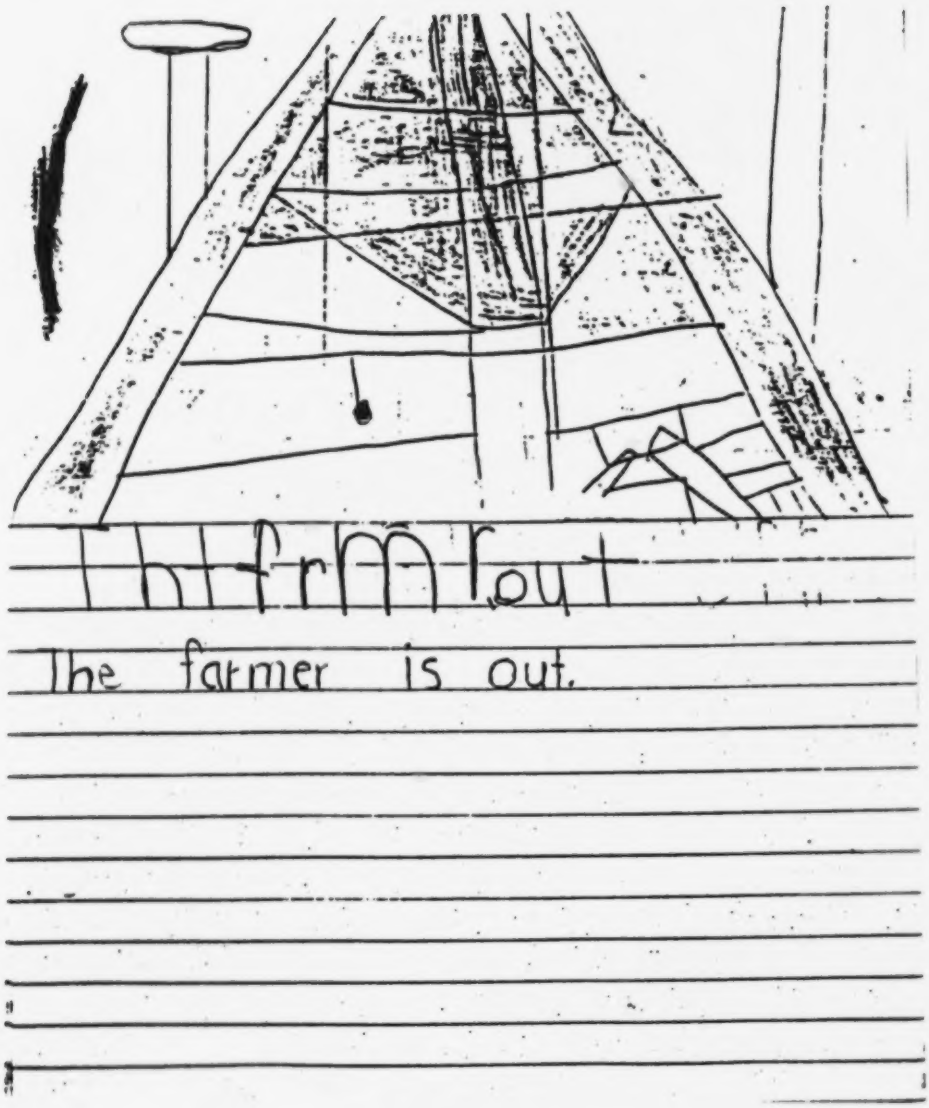

Figure 1: Student emulating teacher's writing model.

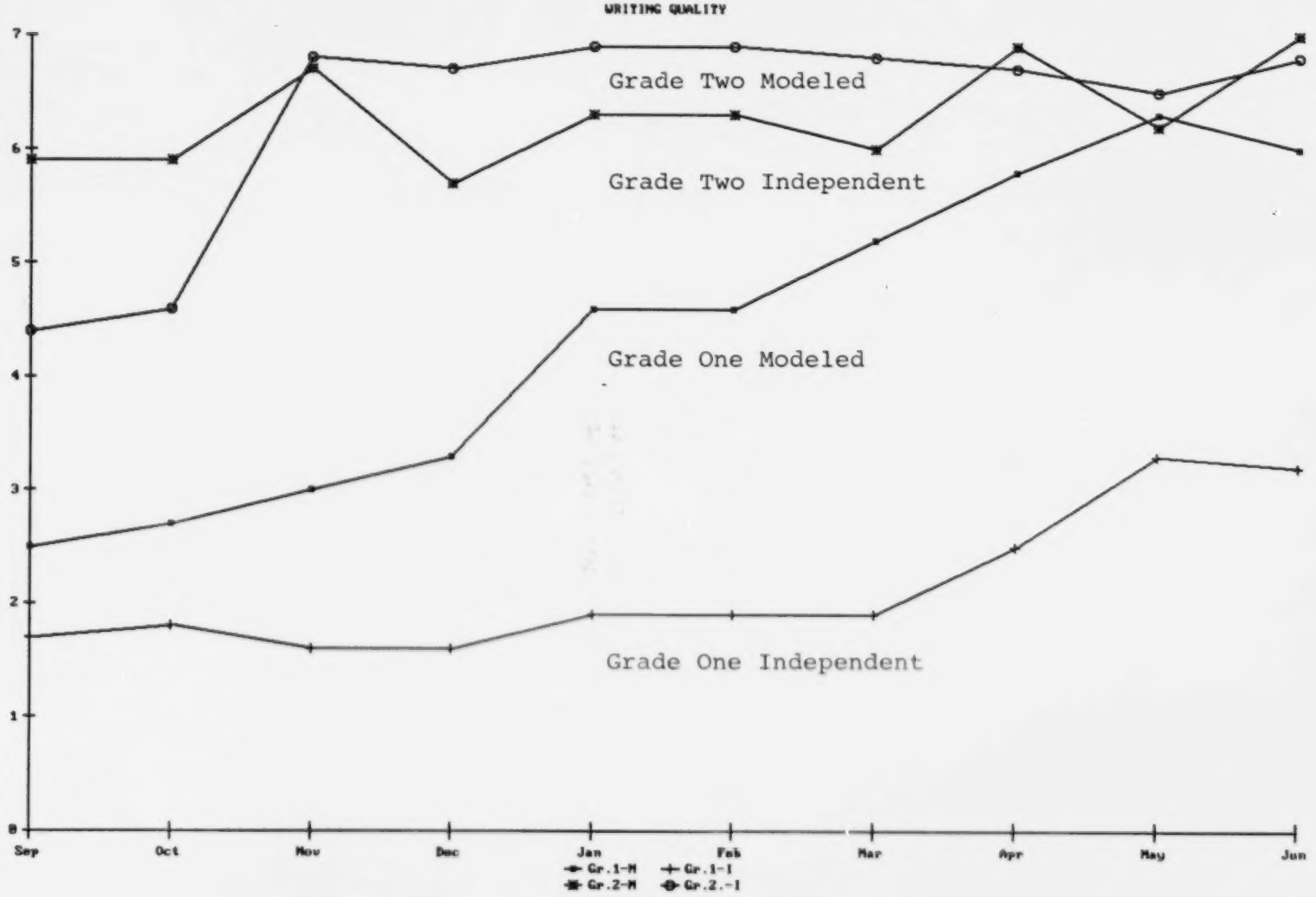

Figure 2: The development of writing quality over two grades in Modeled and Independent classrooms.